RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D)

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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-17	ACDE-00	AID-01	A-01	CA-02	CCO-00
	CIAE-00	CTME-00	C-01	OASY-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DS-00
	FBO-01	HA-09	H-01	IMMC-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	JUSE-00
	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00	M-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OCS-06
	OMB-01	OPR-01	PA-01	PM-01	PRS-01	P-01	SCT-03
	SNP-00	SP-00	SR-00	SSC-01	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7118
INFO AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 02512

E.O. 12356: N.A.
TAGS: PGOV, MARR, PINS, KJUS, VE
SUBJECT: FEBRUARY COUP LEADER RELEASED; REBELS RETURN FROM PERU AND ECUADOR (CAL400254)

REF: A. STATE 56805; B. CARACAS 2271 (AND PREVIOUS)

1. (U) SUMMARY. THE PRINCIPAL LEADER OF THE FEBRUARY 1992 MILITARY COUP, LTC HUGO CHAVEZ, WAS PARDONED AND

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RELEASED FROM DETENTION ON MARCH 26. HE IMMEDIATELY REQUESTED AND WAS GIVEN HIS DISCHARGE FROM THE ARMY. IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS MARCH 26 AND MARCH 27, CHAVEZ ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD TRANSFORM HIS MBR-200 GROUP OF DISSIDENT MILITARY INTO A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND SEEK POLITICAL POWER. HE INITIALLY DISMISSED TALK OF A COUP AGAINST THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT, BUT LATER, IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, SUGGESTED A COUP COULD NOT BE RULED OUT IF THE GOV FAILED TO LIVE UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE COUNTRY. HE ALSO ASSERTED THAT FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER MUNOZ AND SOME ELEMENTS OF THE PENTAGON HAD BEEN PLOTTING A COUP LAST

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 27 MAR 2019
DATE/CASE ID: 04 SEP 2009 200803772

YEAR. THE RELEASE OF CHAVEZ DEMONSTRATED CALDERA'S POLITICAL DEXTERITY. END SUMMARY.

CHAVEZ AND 13 OTHERS RELEASED
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2. (U) LTC HUGO CHAVEZ, THE PRINCIPAL LEADER OF THE FEBRUARY 4, 1992 MILITARY COUP, AND THE FIGURE MOST ASSOCIATED IN THE PUBLIC MIND WITH OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, WAS RELEASED FROM DETENTION ON MARCH 26. CHAVEZ, WHO HAD ACTUALLY BEEN HELD AT A MILITARY HOSPITAL FOR THE LAST MONTH FOLLOWING AN OPERATION AND THE FINAL OUTCOME OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR HIS RELEASE, WAS FREED IN ACCORDANCE WITH A "SOBRESEIMIENTO" (A FORM OF PRESIDENTIAL PARDON BY WHICH CHARGES ARE DISMISSED). HE THEN IMMEDIATELY SOUGHT, AND RECEIVED, HIS DISCHARGE FROM THE ARMY.

3. (U) THIRTEEN OTHER MILITARY REBELS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TWO COUP ATTEMPTS WERE ALSO PARDONED AND RELEASED ON

MARCH 26 (NINE ARMY OFFICERS INVOLVED IN THE FEBRUARY UPRISING AND FOUR PARTICIPANTS IN THE NOVEMBER COUP).

OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE, THEY JUST ENTER POLITICS
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4. (U) IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RELEASE AND SUBSEQUENT DISCHARGE FROM THE ARMY, CHAVEZ, IN CIVILIAN ATTIRE, BRIEFLY ADDRESSED A RALLY OF HIS SUPPORTERS AND NEWSMEN ON MARCH 26. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD ORGANIZE THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT 200 (MBR-200, THE GROUP BEHIND THE FEBRUARY 1992 COUP) INTO A NATIONAL FORCE AND CREATE A VAST NATIONAL FRONT TO PROMOTE THE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION WHICH THE COUNTRY REQUIRES. MBR-200 WILL "TAKE POLITICAL POWER" AND RESCUE VENEZUELA'S NATIONAL DIGNITY. IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTER'S QUESTION ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR A MILITARY COUP AGAINST THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT, CHAVEZ SAID THAT "IT IS VERY RISKY ("ADVENTURADO") TO SPEAK OF A COUP AT THIS MOMENT" (APPARENTLY IT WAS LESS RISKY TO OFFER COMMENTS 24 HOURS LATER WHEN HE SAID AT A PRESS CONFERENCE -- SEE BELOW -- THAT HE COULD NOT DISCARD THE POSSIBILITY OF A COUP IF CALDERA DID NOT FULFILL THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE PUBLIC).

5. (U) ON MARCH 27, CHAVEZ SPOKE TO NEWSMEN FOR SOME TWO HOURS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE. CHAVEZ DENIED THAT HE HAD BELONGED TO OR WILL JOIN CAUSA R. HE AFFIRMED THAT THE BOLIVARIAN MOVEMENT THAT HE LEADS HAS THREE FUNDAMENTAL FACETS: AN IDEOLOGICAL MODEL BASED ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIMON BOLIVAR, SIMON RODRIGUEZ, AND EZEQUIEL ZAMORA; A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION THAT IS MORE

SOCIAL THAN POLITICAL/STRUCTURAL; AND A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR TAKING POLITICAL POWER THAT WOULD GIVE PRIORITY TO THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OVER THE POLITICAL. CHAVEZ UNDERLINED THAT THE STRUCTURE OF MBR WOULD BE MORE HORIZONTAL THAN VERTICAL, AND HE PLEDGED TO COMBAT THE TENDENCY TO PUT POWER IN THE HANDS OF PARTY BOSSES ("COGOLLOS"). HE REFERRED SEVERAL TIMES TO THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSTRUCTING A BROAD NATIONAL FRONT AND AFFIRMED THAT MBR HAD ALREADY DEVELOPED A "NATIONAL PLAN -- SIMON BOLIVAR" THAT CONTEMPLATES A NEW MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD

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CREATE JOBS AND ELEVATE PRODUCTION AND WHOSE PRIORITY
WOULD BE THE INDIVIDUAL.

6. (U) CHAVEZ BLASTED FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER MUNOZ

LEON, AND ASSERTED THAT THE ADMIRAL WAS PREPARING (LAST FALL) A COUP "SUPPORTED BY SECTORS OF THE PENTAGON." SUCH AN ATTEMPT COULD NOT SUCCEED, ACCORDING TO CHAVEZ, BECAUSE THE MILITARY RANK AND FILE AND JUNIOR OFFICERS ARE ALIGNED WITH THE MBR AND THE PEOPLE. CHAVEZ CLAIMED THAT EMISSARIES OF THE COUP PLOTTERS HAD APPROACHED HIM AND PROMISED HIM HIS FREEDOM IN RETURN FOR HIS NEUTRALITY DURING THE PLANNED COUP, BUT THAT HE AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAD BEEN PREPARED TO LAUNCH A COUNTER COUP. THE CURRENT GENERAL OFFICERS ARE "TROGLODYTES", AND THERE IS A DIVISON BETWEEN THIS OLDER GENERATION AND THE YOUNGER OFFICERS WHO REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE BOLIVARIAN IDEALS.

7. (U) CHAVEZ DENIED THAT HE HAD AGREED TO ANY SORT OF DEAL WITH THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT, AFFIRMING THAT HIS ONLY COMMITMENT IS WITH THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE. HE SPOKE OF THE NEED TO CONVOKE A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND CAUTIONED THAT A COUP ATTEMPT COULD NOT BE RULED OUT IF CALDERA DID NOT RESPOND TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE COUNTRY.

REBELS RETURN FROM ECUADOR AND PERU
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8. (U) ON MARCH 25, THREE MILITARY INVOLVED IN THE NOVEMBER 27 COUP RETURNED FROM THEIR VOLUNTARY EXILE IN ECUADOR. THE THREE WILL BE DETAINED AND PLACED BEFORE THE MILITARY COURTS. SIMILARLY, ON MARCH 27 A VENEZUELAN AIR FORCE PLANE RETURNED TO VENEZUELA FROM PERU WITH 34 OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN WHO FLED THE COUNTRY AFTER THE NOVEMBER COUP. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE MEMBERS OF BOTH GROUPS WILL RECEIVE PARDONS SOON AND BE RELEASED (WITH

SOME POSSIBLY REJOINING THE AIR FORCE).

9. (U) REMAINING IN PERU, HOWEVER, WAS GENERAL FRANCISCO JOSE VISCONTI, ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE NOVEMBER INSURRECTION AND APPROXIMATELY 15 OTHER OFFICERS.

COMMENT: THE PENULTIMATE CHAPTER
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10. (C) WITH CHAVEZ' RELEASE AND THE RETURN OF THE MAJORITY OF MILITARY FROM PERU, THE SAGA OF THE 1992 REBELS IS COMING TO AN END. ONLY ONE PARTICIPANT IN THE FEBRUARY COUP STILL REMAINS INCARCERATED (HIS CONTINUED DETENTION APPARENTLY RELATES TO HIS DESIRE TO BE REINCORPORATED INTO THE ARMY AND HIS REFUSAL TO SEEK HIS DISCHARGE). IN ADDITION TO THE 37 NOVEMBER REBELS WHO JUST RETURNED (WHOSE PARDONING AND RELEASE SEEMS IMMINENT), THAT LEAVES SOME 15 IN PERU AND ANOTHER GROUP OF ABOUT 15 PARTICIPANTS IN THE NOVEMBER COUP STILL UNDER DETENTION IN MILITARY PRISONS.

11. (C) CHAVEZ IS THE KEY PIECE IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL PROBLEM CAUSED BY THE DETENTION OF THE 1992 PLOTTERS WHOM MANY HERE VIEW MORE AS HEROES THAN AS REBELS. CHAVEZ SOUGHT TO CAPITALIZE ON HIS FAME AND PUBLIC IMAGE AS THE PRINCIPAL PROTAGONIST OF THE EVENTS THAT LED TO THE EVENTUAL OUSTER (ALBEIT BY CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS) OF CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, BY TRANSFORMING HIS RELEASE INTO THE LAUNCHING OF HIS POLITICAL ENTERPRISE. THE ADMINISTRATION TRIED TO MINIMIZE THE PUBLIC IMPACT OF HIS RELEASE AND POLITICAL DEBUT BY TIMING HIS PARDON WITH THE

BEGINNING OF THE EASTER WEEK VACATION PERIOD. MOREOVER, THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO APPOINT MUNOZ LEON AS AN ADVISER TO THE DEFENSE MINISTRY'S PURCHASING OFFICE IN MIAMI IS NOT COINCIDENTAL. THE APPOINTMENT REMOVED THE POLEMICAL FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER FROM THE COUNTRY AND THUS REDUCED THE PROSPECTS FOR A HEATED MUNOZ/CHAVEZ EXCHANGE WHICH COULD UNDERMINE THE INTERNAL MILITARY COHESION -- AND MORE GENERAL POLITICAL HARMONY -- WHICH THE CALDERA GOVERNMENT SEEKS TO ACHIEVE WITH ITS POLICY OF

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"SOBRESEIMIENTOS."

12. (C) ALL IN ALL, CALDERA HAS HANDLED THE CHAVEZ MESS
WITH POLITICAL DEXTERITY. IN FREEING THE POPULAR COUP

LEADER, [redacted] AT THE SAME TIME, B1
BY REFUSING TO ALLOW CHAVEZ AND OTHERS TO RETURN TO ACTIVE
DUTY, HE AVOIDED INFURIATING THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP. THE
REAL QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER CHAVEZ WILL BE ABLE TO TURN
HIS POPULARITY INTO POLITICAL POWER.

DAVIDOW

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